

**INSIDE VIEW:**

# CREATING THE UNORDINARY

**Jacques Van Staden,**  
**Celebrity Cruises V.P. Food and Beverage Operations**  
talks about Qsine, the new dining venue on  
**Celebrity Eclipse**

by

**Richard H. Wagner**

Qsine is a revolutionary restaurant. Not a revolutionary restaurant for a cruise ship but a restaurant that is different than any found on land or sea. It is a fine dining experience but casual at the same time -- family-style sharing of food is encouraged. The menu takes familiar foods -- modern classics and comfort foods -- and gives them unexpected twists that make them unique to Qsine. Similarly unexpected is the presentation, e.g. Chinese food in Martini glasses, and both the food and wine menus are on Apple iPads. All of this is within a playfully decorated room which underscores that this restaurant is out of the ordinary.

The creative force behind Qsine is Celebrity Cruises' Vice President of Food and Beverage Operations Jacques Van Staden. Not your typical corporate executive, Van Staden is in fact an accomplished and well-known chef.

While other teens were out playing rugby, Van Staden had such a passion for cooking that he spent his

time learning the basics of his craft at a French restaurant in his native South Africa. After graduating high school, he sold his car in order to get enough money for the airfare to the United States where becoming a chef was a more acceptable ambition.

In 1990, Van Staden arrived in the Washington, D.C. area and secured a job cooking at the South African embassy while attending L'Academie de Cuisine. He then proceeded through a series of positions of increasing importance at Washington restaurants, cooking for some of the most powerful people in the world. This included working under the late chef Jean-Louis Palladin at Jean-Louis, adjacent to the White House.

Moving out on the world stage beyond Washington, Van Staden served as chef de cuisine at Alizé, rated one of the top five restaurants in Las Vegas and as executive chef at Vegas' Aladdin Hotel's high-end London Club. Returning to the Washington area, he

became executive chef at the California-French restaurant Citronelle in Georgetown. He also operated his own casual, Mediterranean restaurant, "Café Olé", specializing in tapas, before serving as executive chef for Washington's renowned Watergate Hotel.

In 2007, Van Staden came to Celebrity Cruises and played a major role in developing the ten quite distinct dining venues on the critically-acclaimed Celebrity Solstice. Today, in addition to overseeing the dining operations on the existing Celebrity ships, Van Staden continues to develop ideas for new dining experiences. The latest of these is Qsine, which debuted on Celebrity Eclipse in late April 2010.

"When we introduced our Solstice-class ships in 2008, we took culinary style, taste and creativity to a new level within the cruise industry. When we were shaping Celebrity Eclipse, the third Solstice-class ship, we wanted to continue to disrupt perceptions about dining at sea. We decided to create something 'uniquely unordinary,' - that's Qsine's tagline - so we designed Qsine to offer a globally-influenced blend of nostalgic and contemporary favorites, artfully presented with elements of surprise."

In developing his concept, Van Staden thought not just about the menu items but also the presentation and the décor of the venue. "There are some restaurants that have an incredibly strong visual presence, but the food lacks imagination. Then there are places with zero visual appeal, but out-of-this-world food. Personally, I believe that eating is such a commonly shared bond, that a good dining experience has the power to transport people in a memorable, stimulating way. In order for its patrons to maximize their dining experience, a restaurant should incorporate thoughtful design and congruity between the interior design and lighting, the cuisine, the presentation, the service - everything."

"Qsine is designed to surprise our guests with uniquely unordinary dishes, innovative presentations and engaging experiences. It's designed to allow them to share with each other, sample several different selections, and simply experience both new and favorite foods in an entirely fun and unexpected way."

Qsine's out-of-the-ordinary experience begins with selecting the meal. "Guests are given the opportunity to browse Qsine's wine menu and dinner menu by



*Jacques Van Staden*

using an Apple iPad - this is a great connection to the Celebrity iLounge that debuted on Celebrity Eclipse. Then, the servers verbally take the guests' orders. The dessert menu is on a cube comprised of multiple interlocking squares - a whimsical, fun 'toy,' if you will."

Nor is what is on the iPads a standard menu. "The menu items are largely inspired by both the expected and the unexpected. Take Kobe beef sliders, for example. Everyone's heard of Kobe beef, many people have eaten Kobe beef burgers. But I wanted to make it unique and fun, so I created the 'Slider Party,' where guests receive mini grilled Kobe beef patties with aged Wisconsin cheddar, brioche buns, 'Qsine's original slider sauce' and garnishes - and they build them to their liking. 'Sushi Lollipops' came naturally - a sushi roll is such a neat, cute item, I thought, why not go vertical,



Qsine

and voila. 'Sushi Lollipops' are Nigiri sushi a with soy center, wasabi mayonnaise and pickled ginger-radish salad."

Once selected, the menu items appear before the guests in unconventional ways. "I'm a very visual person, and I tend to think in terms of the senses. As I began to shape the concept for Qsine, I let my imagination wander, and I literally put pencil to paper as thoughts began to take shape. As I began to actually visualize the items, it became clear that presentation would be as important as the cuisine, and that's how I started to design the custom-built serving pieces."

"As the concept for Qsine came together - a venue where guests could enjoy 'uniquely unordinary' experience in every way - it seemed only fitting that the presentation of the dishes be as compelling as the cuisine itself. 'M's Favorites' is a collection of Middle Eastern tastes presented in a custom-designed 'wall,' or shadow box. 'Chitinis' are Chinese-inspired selections served in martini glasses. 'Lava Crab' is Alaskan King crab, sweet yellow corn and scallions with Hataifi and Old Bay sauce, served in glasses over heated red stones."

Qsine occupies the area which on the first two ships of Celebrity's Solstice class is occupied by Silk Harvest, an Asian restaurant. Silk Harvest is a popular venue. However, quite a few cruise ships have pan-Asian restaurants. Thus, Celebrity's decision to replace it with a novel new concept underscores that the line is not

content to rest on its laurels as well as its commitment to expanding the bounds of the culinary experience at sea. "As we were planning Celebrity Eclipse, our president and CEO, Dan Hanrahan, challenged us to go beyond the world-class dining experiences that we had already introduced on the Solstice-class ships, and create a concept that didn't currently exist elsewhere. As you can imagine, it's not every day that a CEO asks a team to provide its wildest ideas, so we took advantage of the freedom to 'go big or go home,' as they say. So, we let our imaginations run wild ... and the rest is history."

